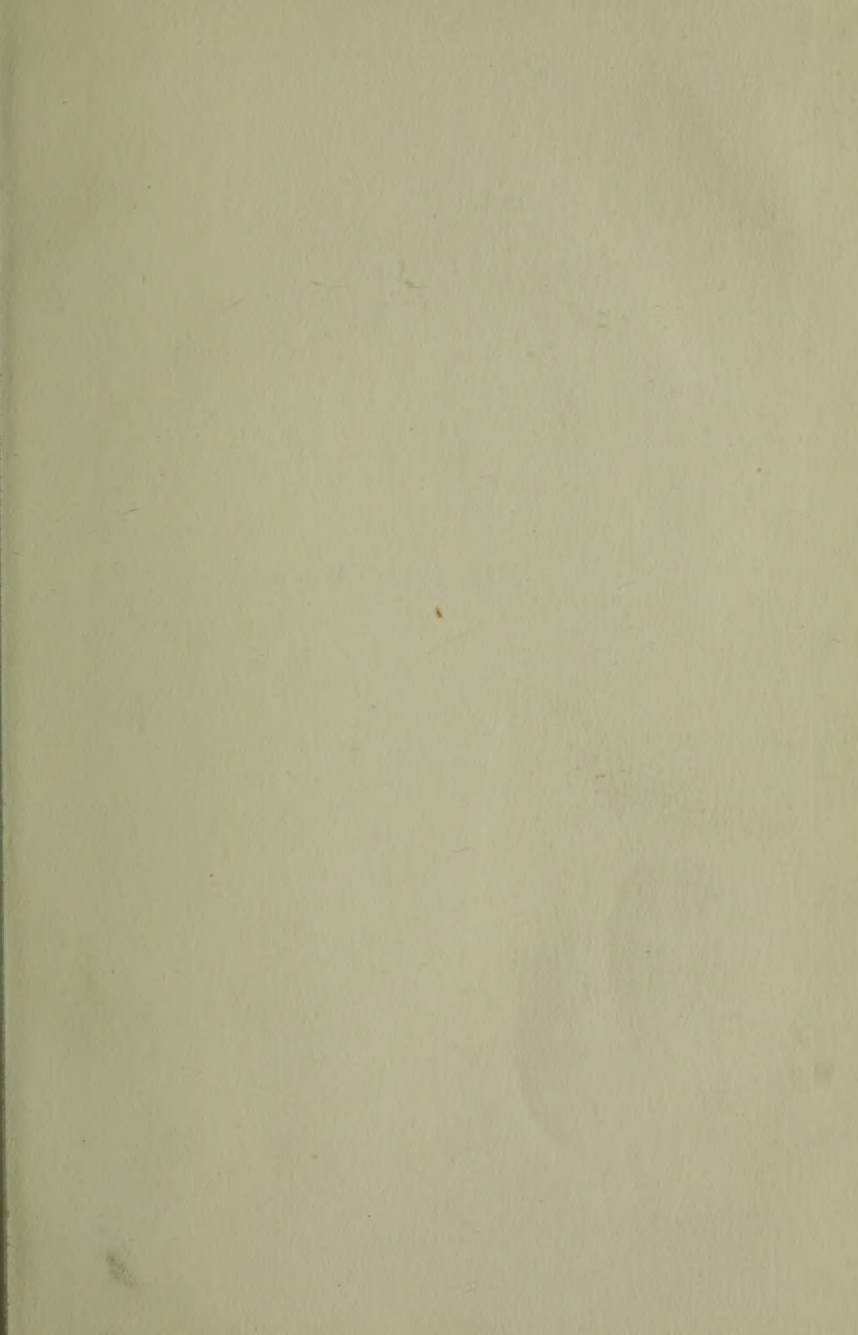


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LAST POEMS

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LAST POEMS

BY

GEORGE MEREDITH

LONDON

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‘Angela Burdett-Coutts’
‘The Centenary of Garibaldi’ and ‘The Crisis’
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ON COMO

A RAINLESS darkness drew o'er the lake
As we lay in our boat with oars unshipped.
It seemed neither cloud nor water awake,
And forth of the low black curtain slipped
Thunderless lightning. Scoff no more
At angels imagined in downward flight
For the daughters of earth as fabled of yore :
Here was beauty might well invite
Dark heavens to gleam with the fire of a sun
Resurgent ; here the exchanged embrace
Worthy of heaven and earth made one.

And witness it, ye of the privileged space,
Said the flash ; and the mountains, as from an abyss

For quivering seconds leaped up to attest
That given, received, renewed was the kiss ;
The lips to lips and the breast to breast ;
All in a glory of ecstasy, swift
As an eagle at prey, and pure as the prayer
Of an infant bidden joined hands uplift
To be guarded through darkness by spirits of air,
Ere setting the sails of sleep till day.
Slowly the low cloud swung, and far
It panted along its mirrored way ;
Above loose threads one sanctioning star,
The wonder of what had been witnessed, sealed,
And with me still as in crystal glassed
Are the depths alight, the heavens revealed,
Where on to the Alps the muteness passed.

THE WILD ROSE

HIGH climbs June's wild rose,
Her bush all blooms in a swarm ;
And swift from the bud she blows,
In a day when the wooer is warm ;
Frank to receive and give,
Her bosom is open to bee and sun :
Pride she has none,
Nor shame she knows ;
Happy to live.

Unlike those of the garden nigh,
Her queenly sisters enthroned by art ;
Loosening petals one by one
To the fiery Passion's dart
Superbly shy.
For them in some glory of hair,

Or nest of the heaving mounds to lie,
Or path of the bride bestrew.
Ever are they the theme for song.
But nought of that is her share.
Hardly from wayfarers tramping along,
A glance they care not to renew.

And she at a word of the claims of kin,
Shrinks to the level of roads and meads :
She is only a plain princess of the weeds,
As an outcast witless of sin :
Much disregarded, save by the few
Who love her, that has not a spot of deceit,
No promise of sweet beyond sweet,
Often descending to sour.
On any fair breast she would die in an hour.
Praises she scarce could bear,
Were any wild poet to praise.
Her aim is to rise into light and air.

One of the darlings of Earth, no more,
And little it seems in the dusty ways,
Unless to the grasses nodding beneath ;
The bird clapping wings to soar,
The clouds of an evetide's wreath.

YOUTH IN AGE

ONCE I was part of the music I heard

On the boughs or sweet between earth and sky,

For joy of the beating of wings on high

My heart shot into the breast of the bird.

I hear it now and I see it fly

And a life in wrinkles again is stirred,

My heart shoots into the breast of the bird,

As it will for sheer love till the last long sigh.

THE LABOURER

FOR a Heracles in his fighting ire there is never the
glory that follows

When ashen he lies and the poets arise to sing of
the work he has done.

But to vision alive under shallows of sight, lo, the
Labourer's crown is Apollo's,

White stands he yet in his grime and sweat—to
wrestle for fruits of the Sun.

Can an enemy wither his cheer? Not you, ye fair
yellow-flowering ladies,

Who join with your lords to jar the chords of a
bosom heroic, and clog.

'Tis the faltering friend, an inanimate land, may drag
a great soul to their Hades,

And plunge him far from a beam of star till he
hears the deep bay of the Dog.

Apparition is then of a monster-task, in a policy
carving new fashions :

The winninger course than the rule of force, and
the springs lured to run in a stream :

He would bend tough oak, he would stiffen the reed,
point Reason to swallow the passions,

Bid Britons awake two steps to take where one
is a trouble extreme !

Not the less is he nerved with the Labourer's resolute
hope : that by him shall be written,

To honour his race, this deed of grace, for the weak
from the strong made just :

That her sons over seas in a rally of praise may
behold a thrice vitalised Britain,

Ashine with the light of the doing of right : at the
gates of the Future in trust.

THE YEARS HAD WORN THEIR SEASON'S
BELT

THE years had worn their season's belt,
From bud to rosy prime,
Since Nellie by the larch-pole knelt
And helped the hop to climb.

Most diligent of teachers then,
But now with all to learn,
She breathed beyond a thought of men,
Though formed to make men burn.

She dwelt where twist low-beaten thorns,
Two mill-blades, like a snail,
Enormous, with inquiring horns,
Looked down on half the vale.

You know the grey of dew on grass
Ere with the young sun fired,
And you know well the thirst one has
For the coming and desired.

Quick in our ring she leapt, and gave
Her hand to left, to right.
No claim on her had any, save
To feed the joy of sight.

For man and maid a laughing word
She tossed in notes as clear,
As when the February bird
Sings out that Spring is near.

Of what befell behind that scene,
Let none who knows reveal.
In ballad days she might have been
A heroine rousing steel.

On us did she bestow the hour,
And fixed it firm in thought ;
Her spirit like a meadow flower
That gives, and asks for nought.

She seemed to make the sunlight stay
And show her in its pride.
O she was fair as a beech in May
With the sun on the yonder side.

There was more life than breath can give,
In the looks in her fair form ;
For little can we say we live
Until the heart is warm.

FRAGMENTS

OPEN horizons round,
O mounting mind, to scenes unsung,
Wherein shall walk a lusty Time :
Our Earth is young ;
Of measure without bound ;
Infinite are the heights to climb,
The depths to sound.

A WILDING little stubble flower
The sickle scorned which cut for corn,
Such was our hope in that dark hour
When nought save uses held the street,
And daily pleasures, daily needs,
With barren vision, looked ahead.
And still the same result of seeds
Gave likeness twixt the live and dead.

FROM labours through the night, outworn,
Above the hills the front of morn,
We see, whose eyes to heights are raised,
And the world's wise may deem us crazed.
While yet her lord lies under seas,
She takes us as the wind the trees'
Delighted leafage ; all in song
We mount to her, to her belong.

THIS love of nature, that allures to take
Irregularity for harmony,
Of larger scope than our hard measures make,
Cherish it as thy school for when on thee
The ills of life descend.

IL Y A CENT ANS

THAT march of the funereal Past behold ;
How Glory sat on Bondage for its throne ;
How men, like dazzled insects, through the mould
Still worked their way, and bled to keep their
own.

We know them, as they strove and wrought and
yearned ;
Their hopes, their fears ; what page of Life they
wist :
At whiles their vision upon us was turned,
Baffled by shapes limned loosely on thick mist.

Beneath the fortress bulk of Power they bent
Blunt heads, adoring or in shackled hate,

All save the rebel hymned him ; and it meant,
A world submitting to incarnate Fate.

From this he drew fresh appetite for sway,
And of it fell : whereat was chorus raised,
How surely shall a mad ambition pay
Dues to Humanity, erewhile amazed.

'Twas dreamed by some the deluge would ensue,
So trembling was the tension long constrained ;
A spirit of faith was in the chosen few,
That steps to the millennium had been gained.

But mainly the rich business of the hour,
Their sight, made blind by urgency of blood,
Embraced ; and facts, the passing sweet or sour,
To them were solid things that nought with-
stood.

Their facts are going headlong on the tides,
Like commas on a line of History's page ;
Nor that which once they took for Truth abides,
Save in the form of youth enlarged from age.

Meantime give ear to woodland notes around,
Look on our Earth full-breasted to our sun :
So was it when their poets heard the sound,
Beheld the scene : in them our days are one.

What figures will be shown the century hence ?
What lands intact ? We do but know that Power
From piety divorced, though seen immense,
Shall sink on envy of the humblest flower.

Our cry for cradled Peace, while men are still
The three-parts brute which smothers the divine,
Heaven answers : Guard it with forethoughtful will,
Or buy it ; all your gains from War resign.

A land, not indefensibly alarmed,

May see, unwarned by hint of friendly gods,

Between a hermit crab at all points armed,

And one without a shell, decisive odds.

OCTOBER 21, 1905

THE hundred years have passed, and he
Whose name appeased a nation's fears,
As with a hand laid over sea ;
To thunder through the foeman's ears
Defeat before his blast of fire ;
Lives in the immortality
That poets dream and noblest souls desire.

Never did nation's need evoke
Hero like him for aid, the while
A Continent was cannon-smoke
Or peace in slavery : this one Isle
Reflecting Nature : this one man
Her sea-hound and her mortal stroke,
With war-worn body aye in battle's van.

And do we love him well, as well
As he his country, we may greet,
With hand on steel, our passing bell
Nigh on the swing, for prelude sweet
To the music heard when his last breath
Hung on its ebb beside the knell,
And VICTORY in his ear sang gracious Death.

Ah, day of glory ! day of tears !
Day of a people bowed as one !
Behold across those hundred years
The lion flash of gun at gun :
Our bitter pride ; our love bereaved ;
What pall of cloud o'ercame our sun
That day, to bear his wreath, the end achieved.

Joy that no more with murder's frown
The ancient rivals bark apart.
Now Nelson to brave France is shown

A hero after her own heart :
And he now scanning that quick race,
To whom through life his glove was thrown,
Would know a sister spirit to embrace.

TRAFALGAR DAY

HE leads : we hear our Seaman's call

In the roll of battles won ;

For he is Britain's Admiral

Till setting of her sun.

When Britain's life was in her ships,

He kept the sea as his own right ;

And saved us from more fell eclipse

Than drops on day from blackest night.

Again his battle spat the flame !

Again his victory flag men saw !

At sound of Nelson's chieftain name,

A deeper breath did Freedom draw.

Each trusty captain knew his part :

They served as men, not marshalled kine :

The pulses they of his great heart,
 With heads to work his main design
Their Nelson's word, to beat the foe,
 And spare the fall'n, before them shone.
Good was the hour of blow for blow,
 And clear their course while they fought on.

Behold the Envied vanward sweep !—
 A day in mourning weeds adored !
Then Victory was wrought to weep ;
 Then sorrow crowned with laurel soared.
A breezeless flag above a shroud,
 All Britain was when wind and wave,
To make her, passing human, proud,
 Brought his last gift from o'er the grave !

Uprose the soul of him a star
 On that brave day of Ocean days :

It rolled the smoke from Trafalgár
 To darken Austerlitz ablaze.
 Are we the men of old, its light
 Will point us under every sky
 The path he took ; and must we fight,
 Our Nelson be our battle-cry !

He leads : we hear our Seaman's call
 In the roll of battles won ;
 For he is Britain's Admiral
 Till setting of her sun.

THE VOYAGE OF THE *OPHIR*

MEN of our race, we send you one
Round whom Victoria's holy name
Is halo from the sunken sun
Of her grand Summer's day aflame.
The heart of your loved Motherland,
To them she loves as her own blood,
This Flower of Ocean bears in hand,
Assured of gift as good.

Forth for our Southern shores the fleet
Which crowns a nation's wisdom steams,
That there may Briton Briton greet,
And stamp as fact Imperial dreams.

Across the globe, from sea to sea,
The long smoke-pennon trails above,
Writes over sky how wise will be
 The Power that trusts to love.

A love that springs from heart and brain
In union gives for ripest fruit
The concord Kings and States in vain
Have sought, who played the lofty brute,
And fondly deeming they possessed,
On force relied, and found it break :
That truth once scored on Britain's breast,
 Now keeps her mind awake.

Australian, Canadian,
To tone old veins with streams of youth,
Our trust be on the best in man
Henceforth, and we shall prove that truth.

Prove to a world of brows down-bent,
That in the Britain thus endowed,
Imperial means beneficent,
And strength to service vowed.

IRELAND

FIRE in her ashes Ireland feels
And in her veins a glow of heat.
To her the lost old time appeals
For resurrection, good to greet :
Not as a shape with spectral eyes,
But humanly maternal, young
In all that quickens pride, and wise
To speak the best her bards have sung.

You read her as a land distraught,
Where bitterest rebel passions seethe.
Look with a core of heart in thought,
For so is known the truth beneath.

She came to you a loathing bride,
And it has been no happy bed.
Believe in her as friend, allied
By bonds as close as those who wed.

Her speech is held for hatred's cry ;
Her silence tells of treason hid :
Were it her aim to burst the tie,
She sees what iron laws forbid.
Excess of heart obscures from view
A head as keen as yours to count.
Trust her, that she may prove her true
In links whereof is love the fount.

May she not call herself her own ?
That is her cry, and thence her spits
Of fury, thence her graceless tone
At justice given in bits and bits.

The limbs once raw with gnawing chains,
Will fret at silken when God's beams
Of Freedom beckon o'er the plains
From mounts that show it more than dreams.

She, generous, craves your generous dole ;
That will not rouse the crack of doom.
It ends the blundering past control
Simply to give her elbow-room.
Her offspring feel they are a race,
To be a nation is their claim ;
Yet stronger bound in your embrace
Than when the tie was but a name.

A nation she, and formed to charm,
With heart for heart and hands all round.
No longer England's broken arm,
Would England know where strength is found.

And strength to-day is England's need ;
To-morrow it may be for both
Salvation : heed the portents, heed
The warnings ; free the mind from sloth.

Too long the pair have danced in mud,
With no advance from sun to sun.
Ah, what a bounding course of blood
Has England with an Ireland one !
Behold yon shadow cross the downs,
And off away to yeasty seas.
Lightly will fly old rancour's frowns
When solid with high heart stand these.

THE CALL

UNDER what spell are we debased
By fears for our inviolate Isle,
Whose record is of dangers faced
And flung to heel with even smile ?
Is it a vaster force, a subtler guile ?

They say Exercitus designs
To match the famed Salsipotent
Where on her sceptre she reclines ;
Awake : but were a slumber sent
By guilty gods, more fell his foul intent.

The subtler web, the vaster foe,
Well may we meet when drilled for deeds :
But in these days of wealth at flow,

A word of breezy warning breeds
The pained responses seen in lakeside reeds.

We fain would stand contemplative,
All innocent as meadow grass ;
In human goodness fain believe,
Believe a cloud is formed to pass ;
Its shadows chase with draughts of hippocras.

Others have gone ; the way they went
Sweet sunny now, and safe our nest.
Humanity, enlightenment,
Against the warning hum protest :
Let the world hear that we know what is best

So do the beatific speak ;
Yet have they ears, and eyes as well ;
And if not with a paler cheek,
They feel the shivers in them dwell,
That something of a dubious future tell.

For huge possessions render slack
The power we need to hold them fast ;
Save when a quickened heart shall make
Our people one, to meet what blast
May blow from temporal heavens overcast.

Our people one ! Nor they with strength
Dependent on a single arm :
Alert, and braced the whole land's length,
Rejoicing in their manhood's charm
For friend or foe ; to succour, not to harm.

Has ever weakness won esteem ?
Or counts it as a prized ally ?
They who have read in History deem
It ranks among the slavish fry
Whose claim to live justiciary Fates deny.

It can not be declared we are
A nation till from end to end

The land can show such front to war
As bids a crouching foe expend
His ire in air, and preferably be friend.

We dreading him, we do him wrong ;
For fears discolour, fears invite.
Like him, our task is to be strong ;
Unlike him, claiming not by might
To snatch an envied treasure as a right.

So may a stouter brotherhood
At home be signalled over sea
For righteous, and be understood,
Nay, welcomed, when 'tis shown that we
All duties have embraced in being free.

This Britain slumbering, she is rich ;
Lies placid as a cradled child ;
At times with an uneasy twitch,

That tells of dreams unduly wild.
Shall she be with a foreign drug defiled ?

The grandeur of her deeds recall ;
Look on her face so kindly fair :
This Britain ! and were she to fall,
Mankind would breathe a harsher air,
The nations miss a light of leading rare.

THE CRISIS

SPIRIT of Russia, now has come
The day when thou canst not be dumb.
Around thee foams the torrent tide,
Above thee its fell fountain, Pride.
The senseless rock awaits thy word
To crumble ; shall it be unheard ?
Already, like a tempest-sun,
That shoots the flare and shuts to dun,
Thy land 'twixt flame and darkness heaves,
Showing the blade wherewith Fate cleaves,
If mortals in high courage fail
At the one breath before the gale.
Those rulers in all forms of lust,
Who trod thy children down to dust

On the red Sunday, know right well
What word for them thy voice would spell,
What quick perdition for them weave,
Did they in such a voice believe.

Not thine to raise the avenger's shriek,
Nor turn to them a Tolstoi cheek ;
Nor menace him, the waverer still,
Man of much heart and little will,
The criminal of his high seat,
Whose plea of Guiltless judges it.
For him thy voice shall bring to hand
Salvation, and to thy torn land,
Seen on the breakers. Now has come
The day when thou canst not be dumb,
Spirit of Russia :—those who bind
Thy limbs and iron-cap thy mind,
Take thee for quaking flesh, misdoubt
That thou art of the rabble rout

Which cries and flees, with whimpering lip,
From reckless gun and brutal whip,
But he who has at heart the deeds
Of thy heroic offspring reads
In them a soul ; not given to shrink
From peril on the abyss's brink ;
With never dread of murderous power ;
With view beyond the crimson hour ;
Neither an instinct-driven might,
Nor visionary erudite ;
A soul ; that art thou. It remains
For thee to stay thy children's veins,
The countertides of hate arrest,
Give to thy sons a breathing breast,
And Him resembling, in His sight,
Say to thy land, Let there be Light.

THE WARNING

WE have seen mighty men ballooning high,
And in another moment bump the ground.
He falls ; and in his measurement is found
To count some inches o'er the common fry.
'Twas not enough to send him climbing sky,
Yet 'twas enough above his fellows crowned,
Had he less panted. Let his faithful hound
Bark at detractors. He may walk or lie.
Concerns it most ourselves, who with our gas—
This little Isle's insatiable greed
For Continents—filled to inflation burst.
So do ripe nations into squalor pass,
When driven as herds by their old private thirst,
They scorn the brain's wild search for virtuous light.

OUTSIDE THE CROWD

To sit on History in an easy chair,
Still rivalling the wild hordes by whom 'twas writ !
Sure, this beseems a race of laggard wit,
Unwarned by those plain letters scrawled on air.
If more than hands' and armsful be our share,
Snatch we for substance we see vapours flit.
Have we not heard derision infinite
When old men play the youth to chase the snare ?
Let us be belted athletes, matched for foes,
Or stand aloof, the great Benevolent,
The Lord of Lands no Robber-birds annex,
Where Justice holds the scales with pure intent ;
Armed to support her sword ;—lest we compose
That Chapter for the historic word on Wrecks.

‘ ATKINS ’

YONDER 's the man with his life in his hand,
Legs on the march for whatever the land,
Or to the slaughter, or to the maiming,
Getting the dole of a dog for pay.
Laurels he clasps in the words ' duty done,'
England his heart under every sun :—
Exquisite humour ! that gives him a naming
Base to the ear as an ass's bray.

THE CENTENARY OF GARIBALDI

WE who have seen Italia in the throes,
Half risen but to be hurled to ground, and now
Like a ripe field of wheat where once drove plough
All bounteous as she is fair, we think of those
Who blew the breath of life into her frame :
Cavour, Mazzini, Garibaldi : Three :
Her Brain, her Soul, her Sword ; and set her free
From ruinous discords, with one lustrous aim.

That aim, albeit they were of minds diverse,
Conjoined them, not to strive without surcease ;
For them could be no babblement of peace
While lay their country under Slavery's curse.

The set of torn Italia's glorious day
Was ever sunrise in each filial breast.
Of eagle beaks by righteousness unblest,
They felt her pulsing body made the prey.

Wherefore they struck, and had to count their dead.
With bitter smile of resolution nerved
To try new issues, holding faith unswerved,
Promise they gathered from the rich blood shed.

In them Italia, visible to us then
As living, rose ; for proof that huge brute Force
Has never being from celestial source,
And is the lord of cravens, not of men.

Now breaking up the crust of temporal strife,
Who reads their acts enshrined in History, sees
That Tyrants were the Revolutionaries,
The Rebels men heart-vowed to hallowed life.

Pure as the Archangel's cleaving Darkness thro',
The Sword he sees, the keen unwearied Sword,
A single blade against a circling horde,
And aye for Freedom and the trampled few.

The cry of Liberty from dungeon cell,
From exile, was his God's command to smite,
As for a swim in sea he joined the fight,
With radiant face, full sure that he did well.

Behold a warrior dealing mortal strokes,
Whose nature was a child's : amid his foes
A wary trickster : at the battle's close,
No gentler friend this leopard dashed with fox.

Down the long roll of History will run
The story of these deeds, and speed his race
Beneath defeat more hotly to embrace
The noble cause and trust to another sun.

And lo, that sun is in Italia's skies
This day, by grace of his good sword in part.
It beckons her to keep a warrior heart
For guard of beauty, all too sweet a prize.

Earth gave him : blessèd be the Earth that gave.
Earth's Master crowned his honest work on earth :
Proudly Italia names his place of birth :
The bosom of Humanity his grave.

MILTON

DECEMBER 9, 1608 : DECEMBER 9, 1908

WHAT splendour of imperial station man,
The Tree of Life, may reach when, rooted fast,
His branching stem points way to upper air
And skyward still aspires, we see in him
Who sang for us the Archangelical host
Made Morning by old Darkness urged to the abyss ;
A voice that down three centuries onwards rolls ;
Onward will roll while lives our English tongue,
In the devout of music unsurpassed
Since Piety won Heaven's ear on Israel's harp.

The face of Earth, the soul of Earth, her charm,
Her dread austerity ; the quavering fate
Of mortals with blind hope by passion swayed,

His mind embraced, the while on trodden soil,
Defender of the Commonwealth, he joined
Our temporal fray, whereof is vital fruit,
And choosing armoury of the Scholar, stood
Beside his peers to raise the voice for Freedom :
Nor has fair Liberty a champion armed
To meet on heights or plains the Sophister
Throughout the ages, equal to this man,
Whose spirit breathed high Heaven, and drew
thence
The ethereal sword to smite.

Were England sunk
Beneath the shifting tides, her heart, her brain,
The smile she wears, the faith she holds, her best,
Would live full-toned in the grand delivery
Of his cathedral speech : an utterance
Almost divine, and such as Hellespont,

Crashing its breakers under Ida's frown,
Inspired : yet worthier he, whose instrument
Was by comparison the coarse reed-pipe ;
Whereof have come the marvellous harmonies,
Which, with his lofty theme, of infinite range,
Abash, entrance, exalt.

We need him now,

This latest Age in repetition cries :
For Belial, the adroit, is in our midst ;
Mammon, more swoln to squeeze the slavish sweat
From hopeless toil : and overshadowingly
(Aggrandized, monstrous in his grinning mask
Of hypocritical Peace,) inveterate Moloch
Remains the great example.

Homage to him

His debtor band, innumerable as waves

Running all golden from an eastern sun,
Joyfully render, in deep reverence
Subscribe, and as they speak their Milton's name,
Rays of his glory on their foreheads bear.

AT THE FUNERAL

FEBRUARY 2, 1901

HER sacred body bear : the tenement
Of that strong soul now ranked with God's Elect.
Her heart upon her people's heart she spent ;
Hence is she Royalty's lodestar to direct.

The peace is hers, of whom all lands have praised
Majestic virtues ere her day unseen.
Aloft the name of Womanhood she raised,
And gave new readings to the Title, Queen.

ANGELA BURDETT-COUTTS

LONG with us, now she leaves us ; she has rest

Beneath our sacred sod :

A woman vowed to Good, whom all attest,

The daylight gift of God.

EPITAPH

ON THE TOMBSTONE OF

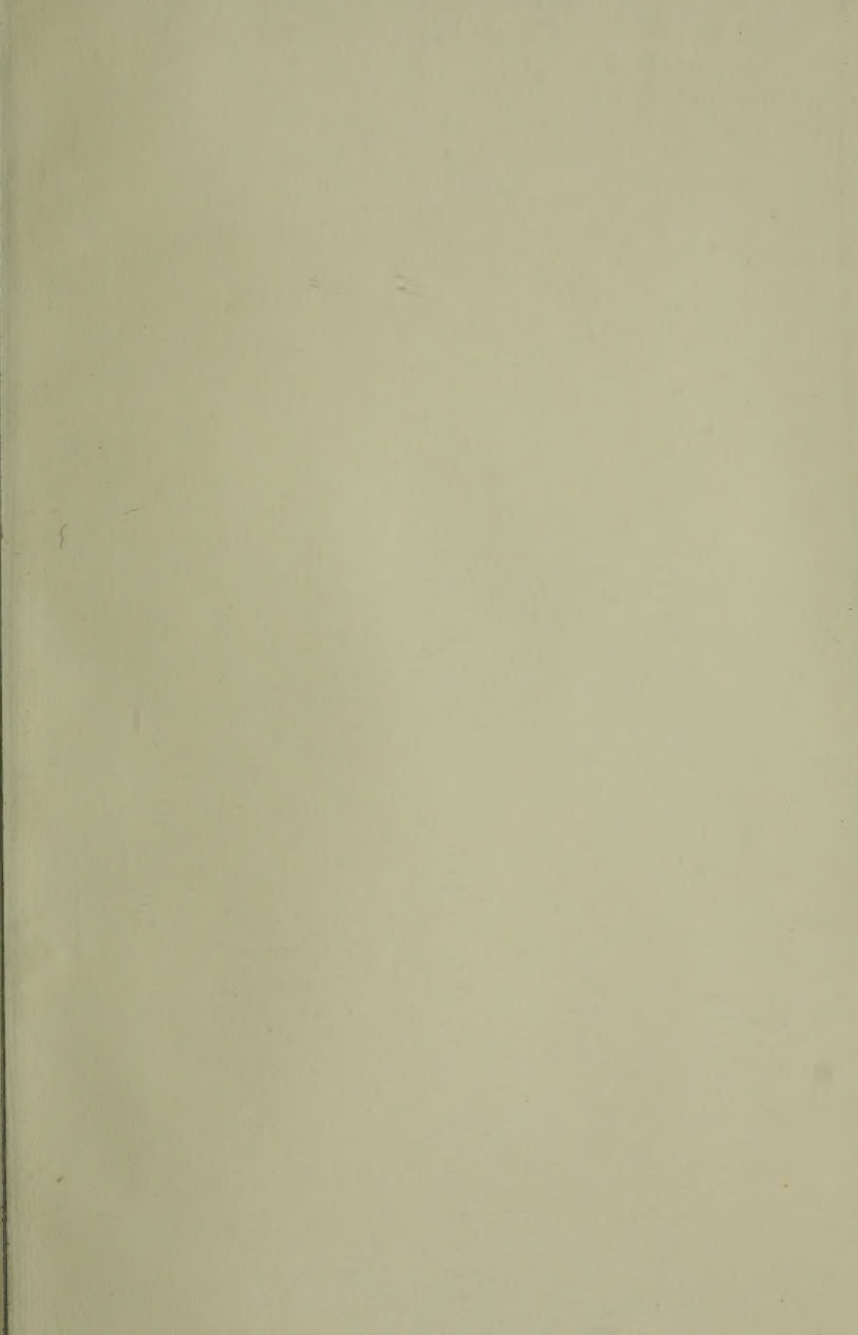
JAMES CHRISTOPHER WILSON

(d. APRIL 11, 1884)

IN HEADLEY CHURCHYARD, SURREY

THOU our beloved and light of Earth hast crossed
The sea of darkness to the yonder shore.
There dost thou shine a light transferred, not lost,
Through love to kindle in our souls the more.

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Meredith, George
Last poems

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